

**REINVESTING IN NEW JERSEY YOUTH:  
BUILDING ON SUCCESSFUL JUVENILE DETENTION REFORM**



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## REINVESTING IN NEW JERSEY YOUTH: BUILDING ON SUCCESSFUL JUVENILE DETENTION REFORM

*In most states, the largest portion of the juvenile justice budget is spent on confining youth, most often in large correctional facilities, or in detention centers awaiting trial or pending placement. On any given day, nearly 100,000 young people nationwide are confined in juvenile institutions, residential "treatment" centers, or group homes by order of a juvenile court.*

**A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform, Annie E. Casey Foundation (2008)**

The Office of the Child Advocate is an independent state agency dedicated to promoting positive change for New Jersey's children, especially those with the greatest need. This policy brief discusses the need for county and state leaders to capitalize on the success of detention center reforms that have resulted in fewer youth being confined in county detention centers. The focus must be on strengthening services and creating innovative programs for youth involved with the juvenile justice system and to prevent youth from offending in the first place.

This report also highlights the fact that as juvenile justice reforms take hold, youth entering county detention facilities generally have more serious offenses, and thus, more complex needs that must be addressed. To accomplish this, counties must reinvest fiscal resources to build quality prevention and treatment programs, as well as detention alternatives.

Investments in these resources will keep our children out of jail, in school and on the path to becoming productive residents of this state. Much of this can be done through creative, cost-neutral strategies and by streamlining and redirecting existing resources.

Several New Jersey counties – and jurisdictions around the country – are accomplishing this by promoting successful interventions that are making a positive, meaningful difference for youth, their families and the communities in which they live.

The Child Advocate urges all New Jersey counties to do the same, and to view any savings in detention costs as an opportunity to reinvest in our children.

### **NEW ALTERNATIVES TO JUVENILE DETENTION**

In 2003, New Jersey's Juvenile Justice Commission took a step in the right direction in responding to alarming trends in the number of youth inappropriately detained in the state's 17 county detention centers and overcrowding those facilities. That year, five New Jersey counties joined a national initiative aimed at reducing detention populations and increasing the youth's chances of successfully transitioning to adulthood.

Since then, five additional counties have joined the effort, and the state is moving toward bringing this initiative statewide.

Known as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, more than 100 sites in 22 states are currently participating.

The initiative has returned impressive results in New Jersey. Annual detention center admissions in these five counties during that same time period decline 41.4 percent, translating to 2,616 fewer youth detained in 2008 in these five counties alone. (Table 1) The five initial counties saw a 44.3 percent drop in the average daily population of youth in detention between 2003 and 2008. (Table 2) The initiative has also resulted in additional detention alternatives and improved services to youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

The guiding principles of JDAI are to appropriately channel youth into less restrictive settings that will help set them on the path to productive adulthood, not to prompt states and counties to close detention centers. However, falling census and tough fiscal times are leading counties to do just that. At the same time, New Jersey's detention centers continue to have ample capacity to serve the youth who must be confined because they cannot be safely maintained in the community.

*The five initial JDAI counties saw a 44.3 percent drop in the average daily population of youth in detention between 2003 and 2008.*

**Table 1**  
**Annual Admissions to Detention**  
**Initial JDAI Sites<sup>1</sup>**

County	2003	2008	5 Year Change 2003-2008
Atlantic	468	335	-28.4%
Camden	1,661	655	-60.6%
Essex	2,460	1,480	-39.8%
Monmouth	508	286	-43.7%
Hudson	1,222	947	-22.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,319</b>	<b>3,703</b>	<b>-41.4%</b>

Other changes are also happening within New Jersey's juvenile detention system, as county leaders explore ways to consolidate resources. Recently, Warren County, a non-JDAI site, closed its detention center doors. Over this past year, two other sites – Passaic and Gloucester - announced plans to close their youth detention facility, citing opportunities for significant cost savings through partnerships with neighboring county centers.

As of January 2009, Warren and Hunterdon Counties<sup>2</sup> began sending their youth to the Morris County facility. Passaic County, also currently a non-JDAI site, but slated as next to join the initiative, plans to close its youth house in April 2009, pending approvals by the Freeholder Board and state Juvenile Justice Commission. If their plan is approved, Passaic will send its daily population of approximately 60 youth to the Essex County facility. Passaic County officials say that the merger will save their county \$10 million a year. Essex County, which cut its daily population nearly in half, was able to close units, resulting in savings that were reinvested in services to youth.

<sup>1</sup>The New Jersey Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives Annual Report, 2008, Juvenile Justice Commission

<sup>2</sup>Hunterdon previously sent its youth to the Warren County facility through a shared services agreement.

Gloucester County, also currently a non-JDAI site, recently submitted plans to close.

Recently, the Casey Foundation named New Jersey the nation's first JDAI state model site to serve as an example to other states working to create positive juvenile justice reforms.

Yet, sending youth to neighboring facilities does not mean they are less needy. In fact, moving youth to other facilities brings additional challenges. For example, youth who are detained in neighboring counties must be afforded appropriate access to their families, attorneys and caseworkers. These youth must also receive essential services and have their educational, health and mental health needs met while they are detained and upon discharge. Other issues such as facility staffing levels, youth gang involvement, transportation needs and accommodations for these populations are also important considerations for county leaders, as each potentially impacts the safety and well-being of youth.

The positive trend toward a reduced need for detention must be viewed as more than a success; it's also an opportunity. The savings gained from the declining census in detention centers throughout New Jersey must be re-invested in New Jersey's youth to prevent juvenile crime and steer youth who offend toward a more positive path to become productive, contributing members of their communities.

Governor Corzine recognized the need for this critical step when, in September 2007, he included JDAI as part of the prevention component of the Governor's anti-crime initiative known as Safe Streets and Neighborhoods.

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New Jersey's FY 2009 budget appropriated \$4 million toward JDAI reform initiatives, underscoring the state's commitment to improve services for at-risk youth and the importance of making meaningful changes to how youth are served by the juvenile justice system. The financial investment by the state has three purposes:

- To permanently staff JDAI at the state level;
- To support innovative policies and practices consistent with JDAI goals at the state and county level;
- To offset the loss of State Facilities Education Act funds incurred by new JDAI sites as the result of detention population reductions.<sup>3</sup>

#### **DECLINING NUMBERS OF NJ YOUTH IN DETENTION**

The Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative is based on guiding principles that local jurisdictions can create effective and efficient juvenile systems that achieve the following goals:

- Decrease the number of youth unnecessarily or inappropriately detained;
- Reduce the number of youth who fail to appear in court or re-offend pending their court decision;
- Re-direct public funds toward effective juvenile justice processes and public safety strategies.

<sup>3</sup>"New Jersey JDAI Site Results Report," submitted to the Annie E. Casey Foundation by the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission in August 2008

With committed state and county leadership, New Jersey has taken this model and become a national leader. Thousands of youth avoid detention and are diverted into other closely supervised alternatives, helping to achieve the dual goal of safeguarding the public and rehabilitating young offenders.

Among the five initial counties that began implementing the initiative in 2003, detention decreased 44.3 percent, from 499

youth on any given day in 2003 to 278 in 2008. Annual admissions to detention in these five counties during the same time dropped to 3,703, or 41.4 percent. (Table 1). That translates to 2,616 fewer youth entering detention in 2008 when compared to 2003 in these five counties alone. In the Phase 2 sites, which were launched in 2005, the average daily population declined, on average, by about 22 percent from 2005 to 2008. (Table 2).

<b>Table 2</b> <b>Average Daily Population</b> <b>Participating NJ JDAI Counties<sup>4</sup></b>				
Original Sites			5-Year Change	
	2003	2008	Kids	%
Atlantic	34.1	24.4	-10	-28.4%
Camden	94.6	49.9	-45	-47.3%
Essex	243.6	114.7	-129	-52.9%
Monmouth	40.0	27.9	-12	-30.3%
Hudson	86.7	60.8	-26	-29.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>499.0</b>	<b>277.7</b>	<b>-221</b>	<b>-44.3%</b>
Phase 2 Sites			3-Year Change	
	2005	2008	Kids	%
Mercer	60.0	42.5	-18	-29.2%
Union	39.2	32.0	-7	-18.4%
Bergen	20.3	12.6	-8	-37.9%
Burlington	20.4	18.0	-2	-11.8%
Ocean	23.7	21.7	-2	-8.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>163.6</b>	<b>126.8</b>	<b>-37</b>	<b>-22.5%</b>

Although not dropping as steeply as in the JDAI counties, statewide admissions to detention centers for both male and female populations declined 25 percent from 2003 to 2007. (Table 3). The census in non-JDAI counties has fluctuated slightly in recent years, increasing in some counties and declining in others. (Table 4).

<sup>4</sup>The New Jersey Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives Annual Report, 2008, Juvenile Justice Commission

**Table 3**  
**NJ Detention Center Admissions Data**  
**Comparison by Year<sup>5</sup>**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	% Change 2003– 2007
<b>Male</b>	10,550	9,956	9,112	8,583	8,184	-22.40%
<b>Female</b>	1,949	1,695	1,554	1,353	1,174	-39.80%
<b>Total</b>	12,499	11,651	10,666	9,936	9,358	-25.10%
<b>% Change</b>		-6.80%	-8.50%	-6.80%	-5.80%	

**Table 4**  
**Average Detention Center Daily Population**  
**All Counties<sup>6</sup>**

County	2006	2007	2008*
<b>Atlantic</b>	24.8	30.3	24.4
<b>Bergen</b>	13.8	10.2	12.6
<b>Burlington</b>	12.9	25.0	18.0
<b>Camden</b>	47.5	44.8	49.9
<b>Cumberland</b>	33.6	36.2	
<b>Essex</b>	115.1	128.6	114.7
<b>Gloucester</b>	10.6	14.0	
<b>Hudson</b>	74.3	63.1	60.8
<b>Mercer</b>	61.2	57.0	42.5
<b>Middlesex</b>	52.7	49.5	
<b>Monmouth</b>	22.3	21.8	27.8
<b>Morris</b>	8.7	7.3	
<b>Ocean</b>	20.3	24.2	21.7
<b>Passaic</b>	68.8	66.2	
<b>Sussex</b>	8.3	8.4	
<b>Union</b>	26.1	27.9	32.0
<b>Warren</b>	5.8	7.5	
<b>State Total</b>	616.6	628.3	

\*At the time this report was written, 2008 data was only available for JDAI counties.

<sup>5</sup>Juveniles in Detention Facilities in New Jersey, Juvenile Justice Commission, 2008

<sup>6</sup>The New Jersey Detention Alternatives Annual Report, 2008, Juvenile Justice Commission



## WHY DETENTION REFORM IS IMPORTANT

New Jersey's progress in detention reform has an enormous impact on youth. According to a February 2007 report on Juvenile Detention Reform published by the National Association of Counties, it is critical to reduce the reliance on detaining youthful offenders for three reasons: detaining children does not promote public safety, detention is costly and detention affects children negatively.<sup>7</sup>

*Research shows that reliance on institutions neither effectively protects the public or rehabilitates youth. In fact, recidivism studies routinely show that 50 to 80 percent of youth released from juvenile correctional facilities are rearrested within 2 to 3 years—even those who were not serious offenders prior to their commitment. Half or more of all released youth are later re-incarcerated in juvenile or adult correctional facilities. Meanwhile, correctional confinement typically costs \$200 to \$300 per youth per day, far more than even the most intensive home- and community-based treatment models.<sup>8</sup>*

Research over the last decade has established that while expensive, the use of detention facilities for most juveniles does little to rehabilitate youth or keep youth safe. Youth placed in detention are frequently there awaiting court dates or awaiting placement in a facility other than their home. New Jersey youth, on average, spend 28 days in detention, but some spend 60 days or longer, separated from their families, communities and school resources. Detention can increase the likelihood that youth will re-offend or re-offend with more serious crimes.

Keeping youth in detention is proven to negatively impact all aspects of their well being. In fact, for youth with mental health needs, detention was found to do more harm than good.

*Far from receiving effective treatment, young people with behavioral health needs simply get worse in detention, not better. Research published in Psychiatry Resources showed that for one-third of incarcerated youth diagnosed with depression, the onset of the depression occurred after they began their incarceration. The transition to incarceration itself may be responsible for some of the observed [increase in mental illness in detention] effect. Even worse, other studies suggest poor mental health and conditions of confinement conspire together to make it more likely that incarcerated teens will engage in suicide and self-harm.<sup>9</sup>*

While detention facilities play an important role in temporarily supervising the most serious offenders, the use of this option must be reserved for the youth who pose the greatest risk to public safety and cannot be safely diverted to an alternative. It is also critical that youth who require treatment and services receive the help they need within the community and are not confined in detention centers because of a lack of access to these needed services.

*Keeping youth in detention is proven to negatively impact all aspects of their well being.*

<sup>7</sup>"Juvenile Detention Reform, Guide for County Officials," February 2007 National Association of Counties

<sup>8</sup>"A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform," the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008

<sup>9</sup>"The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities," Justice Policy Report, Holman and Ziedenberg, 2006

## YOUTH IN DETENTION HAVE SIGNIFICANT NEEDS

The positive decline in the number of New Jersey youth in detention is accompanied by a more disturbing trend. Mirroring national data, New Jersey county detention officials report seeing youth who have greater needs. While some centers are housing fewer youth, it has become more challenging to meet the complex needs of youth who must be detained. Many facilities report that juveniles in detention in JDAI counties are those accused of the most serious offenses, and they are often the youth who have the most significant educational, mental, behavioral and physical health needs. Yet according to some county detention officials, resources, particularly mental health services, remain scarce for many facilities. Several detention centers also report increases in the needs of detained females, including those with mental health needs, those who are pregnant or parenting and those who are gang-involved.

There have also been similar shifts in the reasons youth are detained. One county detention official said that on one particular day this past October, he had 40 youth in his facility, seven of these youth were accused of murder, including two females. Other county officials report similar trends in the number of youth accused of serious and violent offenses, such as murder, and raise concerns over blending this population with those accused of less serious crimes.

For these counties, safely meeting the needs of youth who can participate in detention alternatives, in addition to serving those youth who need to be detained, brings a unique set of programmatic, policy, staffing and technology challenges.

For county leaders, keeping youth safe in the right setting and ensuring these youth are appropriately served demands a coordinated, comprehensive and tailored approach to services and programs. What recent data and research tell us is that the face of juvenile crime is changing and youth entering county detention doors today have significant, complex and varied needs.

Shifts in the nature of alleged offenses among the juvenile population are not the only area in which significant changes in juvenile detention populations are noted. National research supports New Jersey trends suggesting that a substantial number of youth in detention have serious and complex mental health needs and substance use disorders.<sup>10</sup>

These youth pose significant challenges for the nation's juvenile justice system, according to a 2006 study by the Northwestern Juvenile Project, which examined the prevalence of mental health disorders and alcohol and drug use among youth detained at Illinois' Cook County Detention Center. According to the study, even with the exclusion of conduct disorder as a category, which was excluded because many of its symptoms are related to delinquent behaviors, 60 percent or nearly two-thirds of the males and 70 percent or nearly three-quarters of the female detention center residents met diagnostic criteria for one or more psychiatric disorders. It was common for these youth to also have a drug or alcohol addiction.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Juvenile Arrests 2006," United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Juvenile Justice Bulletin, April 2009

<sup>11</sup> "Juvenile Arrests 2006," United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Juvenile Justice Bulletin, April 2008



To the extent that Cook County is typical, the study suggests that nationally, on an average day, as many as 72,000 detained youth have at least one psychiatric disorder, 47,000 detained youth have two or more types of psychiatric disorders and more than 12,000 detained youth have both a major mental health disorder and a substance use disorder.

<sup>12</sup>

Findings from the Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice (FACJJ)<sup>13</sup> in its 2007 Annual Report to the President and Congress revealed that for 30 of the 47 states reporting on the issues facing their juvenile system (including New Jersey), inadequate access to mental health assessments and treatment were most concerning. Substance-related issues, including accessing substance abuse treatment (18 states) and juvenile substance abuse (15 states) were also reported to be significant areas of need.

Other research points to the fact that while fewer in number, females in detention have greater service-related needs than males. Earlier studies indicate that females with challenging behaviors may have worse overall outcomes than males.<sup>14</sup> Further information identifies that “to an extraordinary extent, girls in juvenile justice are likely to be past victims of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Their family histories are often characterized by extreme stress and chaos.”<sup>15</sup>

Meeting the educational needs of youth served in juvenile correctional programs is a continuing challenge nationally. It is estimated that on average 34 percent of detention and corrections populations receive special education services and in some jurisdictions more than 50 percent of youth receive special education services.<sup>16</sup> The picture is even worse for youth when they leave detention. Research cited by the Justice Policy Institute found that 43 percent of youth receiving remedial education services in detention did not return to school after release. Another 16 percent dropped out after only five months.<sup>17</sup>

The 2005 National Youth Gang Survey released in July 2008 identifies gang activity in more than 3,400 jurisdictions served by city (population of 2,500 or more) and county law enforcement agencies in 2005. This annual survey by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) draws from law enforcement agencies across the United States regarding the presence and characteristics of local gang problems. The estimate represents a statistically significant increase in gang activity over the observed 10-year low in 2001. The upward trend of agencies reporting gang problems in recent years also corresponds to notable increases in the 2005 estimated number of gangs (26,000) and gang members (790,000) in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup>“Juvenile Arrests 2006,” United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Juvenile Justice Bulletin, April 2008

<sup>13</sup>The Committee is an advisory body established by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974, as amended (Section 223). The role of FACJJ is to advise the President and Congress on matters related to juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, to advise the OJJDP Administrator on the work of OJJDP, and to evaluate the progress and accomplishments of juvenile justice activities and projects.

<sup>14</sup>“Juvenile Arrests 2006,” United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Juvenile Justice Bulletin, April 2008

<sup>15</sup>“A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform,” Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008

<sup>16</sup>Quinn, Rutherford, & Leone, 2001

<sup>17</sup>“The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities,” Justice Policy Report, Holman, Ziedenberg, 2006

<sup>18</sup>“OJJDP Fact Sheet,” United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, July 2008 Fact Sheet*

<sup>19</sup>“OJJDP Fact Sheet,” United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, July 2008 Fact Sheet*



**BUILDING THE RIGHT SYSTEM:  
IMPROVED PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES  
ADDRESS EMERGING NEEDS**

Nationally, many JDAI jurisdictions are using data, lessons learned and portions of their savings from decreased populations to re-invest funds into detention alternatives and prevention and treatment programs to serve these youth and prevent them from re-offending. Others are also building strong detention policies and programs for serious offenders that must be detained, ensuring that two equally strong systems exist to serve both populations.

When it comes to reform efforts in the field of juvenile justice, quality matters. Making smart choices, such as re-directing current resources into more cost-effective strategies that produce better results, can save county dollars and achieve targeted goals. According to national data, many JDAI sites have introduced multiple detention reforms without raising their total budgets and still others have saved substantial sums.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation notes that JDAI model sites have inspired significant detention reforms in other parts of the juvenile justice system.<sup>20</sup>

These include implementing a variety of screening tools designed to improve decision-making at critical junctures of a juvenile's stay in the system, as well as innovative reforms to strengthen youth and family ties and give youth opportunities to be involved in policy development forums and evaluation processes.

Building strong programs within detention facilities is also important, particularly in areas such as staff training and supports to build a strong workforce, technological improvements, services and administrative costs. Providing a continuum of mental and physical health services, strong education and vocational programs and accessibility to legal advocates are examples of critical services for high-risk youth who must be detained. Given what we know about the nature and needs of juvenile offenders, the opportunity to intercede and help these youth at this critical point in their life cannot be overlooked.

**FROM CONCEPT TO ACTION:  
NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF THE RIPPLE EFFECT  
OF DETENTION REFORM**

Throughout the country, significant and positive prevention initiatives are already up and running, including community programs aimed at front-end prevention,

*Many JDAI sites have introduced multiple detention reforms without raising their total budgets.*

<sup>20</sup>"Detention Reform: A Cost-Saving Approach," the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007

intervention programs intended to reduce recidivism and policies and programmatic changes designed to keep youth from ever entering a detention facility or moving them through the system quickly when detention is necessary. The following highlights many of these national efforts:<sup>21</sup>

- ◆ The New Mexico Children's Code was substantially re-written in 2003 to include revised objective criteria for detention admissions, expedited court processing and other JDAI-related policies and practices.
- ◆ In Maryland, laws were passed that require the promulgation of new detention standards.
- ◆ In California's Santa Clara County, law enforcement agencies developed new objective detention reform criteria to guide police officers on whether to bring arrested youth for detention screening or cite and release them.
- ◆ Participating counties in Illinois have stopped detaining offenders accused of low-level crimes, as a result of JDAI policy and program changes.
- ◆ In Oregon's Multnomah County, a model memorandum of understanding between the police, probation and community agencies fundamentally altered how the police deal with runaways or youth who violate the condition of their parole, consistent with its overall detention reform policy.

- ◆ In Illinois, the Cook County Circuit Court's Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department established an Educational Advocacy Unit to help parents receive appropriate individualized education plans for their court-involved children. The unit helps prevent youth with special education needs from being pushed out of schools as a result of behavioral problems and monitors cases to ensure that schools are complying with the plans as mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.



- ◆ Three model sites — Cook County, IL; Multnomah, OR; and Santa Cruz, CA--were selected to participate in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Reclaiming Futures initiative, which seeks to increase the prevention and treatment services available to drug-involved youth in the juvenile justice system.
- In 2006, Connecticut adopted a state plan to increase gender responsive programming that draws on research and knowledge of female development, socialization, risks, strengths and needs to guide all aspects of service design and delivery.

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<sup>21</sup>"Results from the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative," the Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/JuvenileDetentionAlternativesInitiative/JDAIResults.aspx>

- ◆ After data revealed that many of their detention beds were occupied by youth who were non-compliant with their probation orders, Cook County also established a network of evening reporting centers to divert probation violators. Open from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m., when youth are most likely to get into trouble and located in high-need neighborhoods, the county reports that about nine out of 10 youth successfully complete the requirements of this evening reporting program.

### REFORMS BRING SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS FOR MANY STATES

The decline in detention center census has resulted in savings in other states. Some of these states have reinvested that savings into programs that can help youth succeed.<sup>22</sup>

Both Pierce County, Washington and Bernalillo County, New Mexico, experienced reductions in detention censuses that allowed them to close parts of their detention facilities, resulting in \$800,000 and \$200,000 in savings, respectively. Both used these savings to support community programs and detention alternatives for youth who would have previously been detained.

Bernalillo County, for example, established a Youth Reporting Center, an alternative that provides education, case management, social skills and behavioral instruction, all with an emphasis on protecting both the youth and the community.<sup>23</sup> County detention officers were re-trained to work at the Youth Reporting Center, which also helped save on training costs, as the officers were already trained in providing security.

In Santa Cruz County, California, which had been operating its juvenile center at approximately 45 percent above capacity

prior to becoming a JDAI county, new construction costs were avoided and local government was able to divert resources to facility improvements and a new health clinic. More than \$7 million in detention expenses have been redeployed to community alternatives since 1998.

Multnomah County, Oregon redeployed more than \$12 million. By reducing its reliance on detention, Multnomah was able to close three 16-bed detention units and divert roughly \$2 million a year to other needed services.

In Georgia, the Department of Juvenile Justice invested more than three-quarters of a million dollars in new, community-based alternatives-to-detention programs.<sup>24</sup> It also re-directed 12 staff members to serve as "detention expeditors" who advocate for non-secure options when possible, as well as assist in the search for treatment programs. This adds another layer of advocacy for youth in the juvenile justice system and creates greater interaction between the youth and the court system.

*Some states have reinvested savings into programs that can help youth succeed*

The proposed construction of a costly new detention facility was avoided in Cook County, Illinois, saving \$24 million dollars, allowing a re-investment in community services.

<sup>22</sup>"Detention Reform: A Cost-Saving Approach," the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007

<sup>23</sup>Juvenile Detention Reform, Bernalillo County, New Mexico, January 20, 2006

<sup>24</sup><http://www.djj.state.ga.us/Policies/DJJPolicies/Chapter20/DJJ20.2DetentionMonitoring.pdf>

## ADVANCING REFORMS:

### NEW JERSEY SITES DEMONSTRATE POSITIVE REFORMS

New Jersey's efforts to divert youth from detention have yielded impressive results and some counties are moving their reforms in new directions. While initial investments necessarily focused on alternatives to detention, such as electronic monitoring, some counties are now reinvesting savings that resulted from a reduced detention census into enhancing programs for youth both in and out of detention. Gang prevention programs are operational in some New Jersey locations, as are treatment-based options and after-school reporting centers that emphasize the need for education and therapeutic interventions with families. Within the framework of the initiative, these policy and practice reforms are formally reported, emphasized and tracked for stakeholders as a "what works" resource reference. Some of these innovative ideas are highlighted below:<sup>25</sup>

**Mercer County** designated a probation officer as an education liaison to ensure that youth are re-enrolled in school and to assist families with any associated school system paperwork. This re-investment of a staff member's time is a way to ensure that youth have smooth transitions back into their community educational system, which is frequently difficult.

**Union County** initiated a program for youth with pending violation of probation charges. In situations where the youth is non-compliant, a second charge of violating probation is not filed, but rather a 'violation of probation addendum' is used to include this behavior in the original charge. This is aimed at reducing case processing times, as the youth only need to be adjudicated on one charge instead of multiple violations of probation. Hudson invested a portion of

their federal/state appropriation to provide transportation for court-involved youth to and from appointments, evaluations, court hearings and dispositional placements, in order to reduce non-appearances.

**Atlantic and Mercer Counties** used local funds to develop structured recreation programs to help reduce violations of in-home detention and fulfill community service requirements on weekends and during the summer – the times when youth are likely to have less structured schedules. Both include athletic activities aimed at improving teamwork. In Mercer County, youth are expected to complete an hour of community service at the site immediately following their recreation. Atlantic County offers additional programs, such as CPR training, through a local hospital to teach youth essential skills. Not only do these programs provide a healthy, structured way for youth to spend time, they also aim to reduce problems that youth face in working to keep themselves out of the detention system.

**Union County** enhanced their electronic monitoring by contracting with a provider offering youth basic life skills and job training, advice regarding the court process and potential outcomes, counseling and transportation to court hearings and program services. This program helps youth stay out of the juvenile justice system by giving them positive, real-world skills that can be used to self-empower them to improve their own outcomes.

*Some New Jersey counties are now reinvesting savings that resulted from a reduced detention census into enhancing programs for youth.*

<sup>25</sup> New Jersey JDAI Site Results Report, Juvenile Justice Commission, 2005-2006, 2007 and 2008



**Essex County** streamlined access to detention alternatives by hiring three part-time monitors to improve staffing ratios at these programs. This helped improve confidence in the alternatives, making them a more viable option.

**Camden County's** probation department, in collaboration with the county Youth Services Commission, conducted assessments of five residential programs that had an historically high number of youth violating the program, thus resulting in additional stays in detention. This assessment included a survey given to youth to receive feedback on their program experience. Such an initiative was aimed at reducing violation of probation charges for youth in these programs.

**Monmouth County** holds meetings specific to expediting cases when a youth's length of stay exceeds 30 days. These meetings always include the juvenile judge and a detention staff member who dedicate part of their time exclusively to the process of expediting cases. Defense counsel and the prosecutor are often involved in these meetings.

These efforts are all significant steps in the right direction. Yet, much work remains to be done.

During the Office of the Child Advocate's 2007 and 2008 visits to all of New Jersey's 17 detention centers, almost all center directors said that safely caring for detained youth with serious mental health and substance abuse treatment needs is challenging, as resources to address the critical needs of these youngsters remain scarce. Detention officials reported spikes in the number of gang-involved youth in their facilities. Some said that increases in the number of detained pregnant females are exceptionally challenging given the physical health, well-being, discharge planning and safety needs of the mother and unborn child.

Still others described challenges in identifying appropriate placement resources for youth who are ready for release, but unable to return to their families.

While forging quality programs is challenging, it need not be costly and can potentially save money. For example, in those facilities where fewer staff are required due to decreased populations, re-training existing detention officers to serve as home detention or electronic monitoring officers creates an opportunity for seasoned staff to be deployed to areas of need.



Re-deploying staff may increase available detention alternatives offered to youth and serve youth in their communities, even if the county's detention center has been regionalized with another county.

Given that the needs of the juvenile detention population are changing, and growing more complex and challenging, providing quality training opportunities to detention officers and staff responsible for these high-risk youth is a way to improve conditions of care. Supporting the workforce in meeting their responsibilities to safely and effectively care for youth is critical to building a strong, functional juvenile justice system.



*While forging quality programs is challenging, it need not be costly and can potentially save money.*

Similarly, offering quality programs and services that maximize continuum of care opportunities for youth served in detention facilities and through detention alternatives is essential to the overall success of juvenile justice reform.

These kinds of investments often cost very little. For example, the Camden County detention center created a gang taskforce comprised of individuals already on staff, who are occasionally assisted by interested community residents. This taskforce provides training for facility staff members and shares information with the county Prosecutor's Office in an effort to better understand the rising gang population both at the facility and in the community. The investment here is one of time and communication, carries no fiscal implications, and yet addresses issues that are of significant concern to the county.

In all county detention centers, detention staff is trained to manage youth with difficult behaviors through de-escalation techniques. The training promotes staff and youth safety while emphasizing communication and non-physical interventions to pre-empt situations that could otherwise lead to physical harm.<sup>26</sup> Several identified staff received "train-the-trainer" instruction to be used for future hires at a one-time cost.

Some counties have re-assigned detention social workers to become full-time detention alternative supervisors or court liaisons.

New aspects of this position include attending court hearings, participating in detention review hearings and co-chairing the detention review committee to improve the efficiency of the alternative referral and placement process. The staff member also helps foster communication between local and state agencies to ensure service provision and appropriate placement where necessary.

However, one particular area in which greater attention and investment is needed is in overall discharge and transition planning activities for youth leaving detention centers. Many youth are released from county detention and placed in out-of-home settings, including places such as residential treatment facilities, group homes and foster care. Other youth are able to return home, yet require community services and supports. Regardless of their placement type, youth released from county detention require an assessment of their strengths and needs, as well as planning to ensure appropriate services are in place to serve the youth upon discharge.

All New Jersey county detention facilities operate under a Manual of Standards regulated through the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission. While the Juvenile Justice Commission has standards for guiding juvenile re-entry from secure state facilities, the Manual of Standards that governs county detention lacks any requirements for discharge and transition planning for detained youth. As a result, there are no uniform standards for how detention centers coordinate, plan and secure needed services for youth upon their release.

<sup>26</sup><http://www.crisisprevention.com/>

Important services for youth at the time of discharge include mental health and substance use treatment, ensuring that youth have health insurance and addressing other needs, such as school, enrollment in vocational, employment or other programs and assistance with housing, transportation or other needs, such as “aging-out” services. The importance of appropriate discharge planning and the timely provision of needed services are crucial to supporting youth, preventing repeat offenses and shepherding youth toward a more productive path.

#### LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

There are many examples of “lessons learned” by states and local jurisdictions that have embarked on efforts to reform their juvenile justice system. Most speak of the need to ensure that there is commitment on every level – and from all internal and external stakeholders – to bring about needed change. Strong local leadership, collaboration, a shared vision and buy-in by all stakeholders is key.

These lessons also emphasize that there is no such thing as a “one size fits all” approach to reform. Like the youth they serve, each state and county has its own unique needs.

Selecting clear attainable goals through the process of honest self-assessment and regular, consistent re-evaluation of efforts is integral to embarking on the path to successful reform. The work of reform should be driven by data that identifies priority areas within the juvenile justice system and strategies for meeting the treatment needs of youth while fostering academic progress and providing opportunities for youth to produce successful outcomes.

For county leaders considering or currently working on reform, these lessons learned,

together with best practice recommendations, can serve as guides. Juvenile justice reform experts have identified numerous best practice guidelines for implementing successful juvenile programs. Most have the following core values:

- Reform efforts include providing youth and families with a wide array of services. These services are provided at home or in home-like settings and with the youth’s family when feasible;
- Youth services must be integrated and based on a continuum model;
- Services and interventions should be scientifically proven to be successful (evidence-based);
- Alternative programs are supported by smart decisions, timely case processing, accurate information systems and quality supervision;
- Treatment should be built on youth and family strengths and tailored to the individual needs of the youth and family;
- Services must be culturally sensitive, diverse and respectful to the youth and family;
- Youth behavior is a symptom of other issues, all of which need to be addressed.

*It’s important for county leaders to remember that adolescents remain, far less able to gauge risks and consequences, control impulses, handle stress, and resist peer pressure. Perhaps the most important difference between adolescent and adult lawbreakers is that youthful offenders will cease lawbreaking as part of the normal maturation process.<sup>27</sup>*

<sup>27</sup>“A Road Map for Juvenile Justice Reform,” the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008

There is no question that the reform of juvenile justice practices and programs already underway in New Jersey presents significant challenges.

Effective reform requires a shared vision to do the work necessary to ensure there are enough safe and appropriate facilities for those that require the security of detention, as well as ample and effective programs to re-direct eligible youth to alternatives.

The Office of the Child Advocate recommends that fiscal savings resulting from a reduction in detention populations in New Jersey be used to improve and expand detention alternatives and to boost services for youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system or at-risk of offending.

The Child Advocate encourages state, county and local leaders to reinvest savings achieved through reduced detention populations into productive programs that can prevent youth from entering or re-entering the juvenile justice system. Whenever possible, youth must receive appropriate services and treatment within communities and avoid traditional detention settings. In the long run, counties may see even greater savings of public money with this initial investment in youth, as detention funds are instead spent on rehabilitative programs that prevent juvenile crime, reduce the number of youth in detention and improve their chances for finishing school, landing a job and becoming productive residents who contribute to their communities.

To learn more about the  
New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate,  
go to: [www.childadvocate.nj.gov](http://www.childadvocate.nj.gov).

This report was prepared by Child Advocate staff Alison Hanna and Maria McGowan.

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The New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate is an independent state agency dedicated to promoting positive change in public policy and practice to improve the safety, health and well-being of New Jersey children, especially those with the greatest need.

To achieve this goal, the Child Advocate identifies important issues that require systemic change. The Child Advocate works closely with Legislators, government officials, community stakeholders and other advocates to craft innovative solutions to identified problems. The Child Advocate then monitors implementation of these reforms to make a real difference in the lives of New Jersey's children and their families.

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